Headache in Stroke: Use of the International Headache Society Classification

I wish to comment on certain aspects of the article “Headache in Stroke” by Vestergaard et al. 1 According to the classification of the International Headache Society (IHS), any patient who develops a new form of headache (including migraine, tension-type headache, and cluster headache) in close temporal relation to a vascular disorder is coded to group 6, termed “headache associated with vascular disorders.” Because the aim of this article was to “classify headache appearing in stroke patients . . . using the new headache classification,” I was surprised to see that the authors did not mention group 6. According to the IHS classification, headaches associated with “acute ischemic cerebrovascular disease” and “intracranial hematoma” are coded to groups 6.1 and 6.2, respectively. Headache associated with “thromboembolic stroke—symptoms persisting more than 24 hours” is coded to subgroup 6.1.2. Headache associated with intracerebral hematoma is coded to subgroup 6.2.1.

The possibility of adding the fourth digit to specify the type of headache was mentioned by the authors in a misleading way. Indeed, the diagnostic criteria provided by the IHS were not followed. Headache associated with acute ischemic cerebrovascular disease may “begin as long as two weeks after the stroke.” However, in the present study the patients were interviewed about headache occurring by up to 3 days after the acute event. No information on the status of carotid arteries was given. This would have been particularly important in patients with lateralized headache and ipsilateral infarct to exclude carotid dissection (coded to group 6.4.2).

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Stroke. 1994;25:914
doi: 10.1161/01.STR.25.4.914.a
Stroke is published by the American Heart Association, 7272 Greenville Avenue, Dallas, TX 75231
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Print ISSN: 0039-2499. Online ISSN: 1524-4628

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World Wide Web at:
http://stroke.ahajournals.org/content/25/4/914.1.citation

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